New Fairbury Motorcycle Club Formed in 1939

By: Dale C. Maley
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In the 1910s, Fairbury was known as the motorcycle capital of the world. The first motorcycle club in Fairbury was established in 1910 by John L. Purdum. Carl Goudy established an Excelsior motorcycle dealership in Fairbury in this era. Carl Goudy and his brother William Goudy became world-class motorcycle racers and were inducted into the American Motorcycle Association Hall of Fame. The membership in this first motorcycle club peaked at 150 members. There are several iconic photographs of large groups of motorcycles in Fairbury that still survive today. This club closed out by 1919.

The story of Fairbury's second motorcycle club started with the birth of William P. Wince in 1837 in Licking, Ohio. In 1882, William married Emma Wynistorf in Newark, Ohio. Following their marriage, the couple moved to a farm north of Fairbury. Their farm was northwest of the First Street Vermilion River bridge, about six miles north of Fairbury.

William and Emma Wince had five sons and three daughters. One of their sons, Chester Wince, was born in 1919 in Fairbury. As a young man, Chester purchased a motorcycle.

In 1937, several Fairbury area men formed an informal motorcycle club. They would drive their motorcycles on jaunts to Lincoln, Springfield, Peoria, Bloomington, and Ottawa on Sundays. This group had two favorite local activities. One of these activities was "hill-climbing" on the hill behind the abandoned coal mine shaft on the east edge of Fairbury. The other favorite activity was driving their motorcycles across the ford in Indian Creek northeast of Fairbury.

In 1939, this group decided to obtain a charter from the American Motorcycle Association and create the Vermilion Valley Motorcycle Club. The 25 members of this club lived in Wing, Forrest, Chatsworth, Fairbury, Pontiac, and Ocoya. To become a member of this club, one had to own a motorcycle. In that era, a bike had a cost of $250 to $500. The $250 price tag of a motorcycle would be equivalent to $4,735 in today's dollars. Members of the club wore their red silk shirts with the lettering "Vermilion Valley" on their trips. The group had a clubhouse and a .6 mile race track on the Emory Wince farm, six miles north of Fairbury.

The first officers of this club included: Ray Thornhill, Forrest, president; John Bushman, Fairbury, vice-president; Roy Swing, Fairbury, secretary; Dale Wrightam, Pontiac, assistant secretary; David Kohler, Fairbury, treasurer; Gene Hines, Fairbury, referee; Charles Luttrell, Fairbury, road captain; Francis Anderson and Harold "Red" Allen, of Wing, Clifford Bochman and Dale Wrightam of Pontiac, and Lyle Beatty of Fairbury, trustees. This motorcycle club had at least one female member. Mrs. Ray Thornhill drove her motorcycle at the Wince farm race track.

In May of 1940, the Pantagraph sent a photographer to the race track at the Emory Wince farm. The photographer took 14 photos of club members and their families. Some of these photographs were used in a Pantagraph story published on May 25, 1940. The Pantagraph recently agreed to release their old negatives to the McLean County Museum of History. The museum scans the old negatives and makes them available for free on their website. These old photographs have excellent quality and give an exciting glimpse into the activities of this motorcycle club.

The Pantagraph photos include Don Leister, Chester Wince, David Kohler, Marilyn Swing, Mrs. Roy Swing, Butch Austin, John Bushman, and Mrs. Ray Thornhill. One photo shows the children at the race track and included Ella Rose Wooten, Richard Wince, Helen Wooten, Alice Wince, Mary Lou Wince, Clara Wooten, and Patricia Wince.

In 1963, Emory and Emma Wince were living in a house on their farm. Emory was 74 years of age, and Emma was 65 years old. On a Wednesday night, their regular evening of watching television was interrupted when two escaped inmates from the Pontiac Prison arrived at their house on July 10, 1963.

The two inmates were 19-year-old James Lawson from Jacksonville and 20-year-old John F. Holland of Freeport. One of the men was scheduled to be released on parole, and the other was due to be paroled in another two months. Both men went missing at 1:30 p.m. when they walked off the prison honor farm in Pontiac.

When the two men entered the Wince home, one had a pitchfork, and the other had a club. Their clothing was torn, and they demanded food. One of the men told Mrs. Wince they would not hurt the couple if they did what they asked. Mrs. Wince gave them food and coffee. The escapees told the couple they had been hiding in a barn before they "cased their farmhouse" and decided to enter the home.

The escapees then demanded money, clothing, and weapons. The Winces surrendered two .22 rifles, a .410 shotgun, some ammunition, two chambray shirts, a pair of wash trousers, one pair of shoes, and a 20 dollar bill.

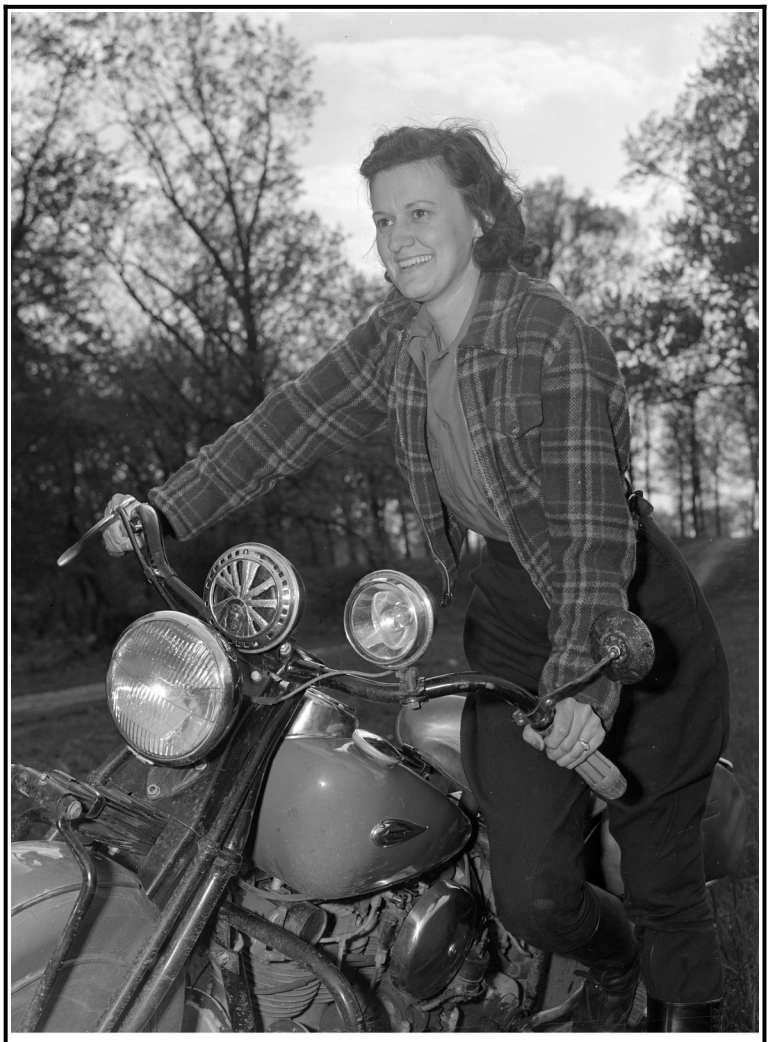
The escapees also demanded the car keys and requested directions to St. Louis and Springfield. The two men said they would take a hostage when they drove the car away. Mrs. Wince showed the men her heart pills in her purse and mentioned that her husband was 74 years old and would be unable to stand the strain of such an adventure. The men then discussed the option of waiting for Mrs. Wince's daughter to arrive and then taking her as a hostage. The men finally left the Wince home in their car. Both men were apprehended a short time later. Both men had their prison terms extended because of their escape attempts.

The last published mention of the Vermilion Valley Motorcycle Club was in 1974. Charles Follmer was elected president at their annual holiday turkey dinner. Other

officers elected were: Gene Hines, vice president; Jacob Gutteridge, secretary; Bud Denker, road captain; and Vera Boldrey, referee.

Emory Wince died in 1964 at the age of 74. Emma Wince passed away in 1986 at the age of 77. Their son, Chester Wince, lived to be 95 years old and died in 2015.

The Vermilion Valley Motorcycle Club was in existence for at least 30 years. The clubhouse and race track at the Wince farm north of Fairbury provided a place for motorcycle races and social events for the members' families.



Mrs. Ray Thornhill was one of the female members of the Vermilion Valley Motorcycle Club